

record high with one in four leaving the department last year alone.

Officials believe these problems have been caused by low wages, staff shortages, and a tougher breed of criminals entering the prison system. Salaries for prison guards in Texas begin at \$23,040 and top out at \$33,948. This is one of the lowest pay scales nationally for prison guards. As a result, people are leaving the field or not entering it at all. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice workforce was down almost 4,000 employees in August. This means facilities are more vulnerable and employees are at increased danger for attacks.

This is unacceptable. We need to make sure our prison system is secure so that our prison guards and staff can go to work without fear of being assaulted and we need to make working conditions better for these people who have some of the toughest jobs in society, to protect our communities from dangerous criminals.

The toughest beat in America is the one assigned to our prison guards who watch those who have committed crimes against our people. We owe these guards our greatest appreciation.

And that's just the way it is.

TRIBUTE TO HIGHLANDS HIGH SCHOOL

HON. GEOFF DAVIS

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 13, 2007

Mr. DAVIS of Kentucky. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the academic achievements of Highlands High School in Ft. Thomas, KY. Recently, Highlands High School was announced by the U.S. Department of Education as a recipient of the 2007 Blue Ribbon Award.

The Blue Ribbon Award was presented to 287 distinguished schools nationwide and I am pleased that Highlands High School was one of four from Kentucky's Fourth Congressional District.

Highlands has worked hard in advancing its curriculum and performance of its students to ensure that they are some of the best and brightest in our Nation. This is an accomplishment that deserves great praise for the students, parents and teachers. In a world where we are facing competition from abroad and we frequently hear that our students are lagging behind, Kentucky's Blue Ribbon schools are forging ahead.

I would also like to highlight the fact that Highlands is ranked in the Top 1000 High Schools by U.S. News & World Report. Furthermore, Highlands' commitment to educational excellence shines through in its "Cum Laude chapter" that stresses not only academic, but civic and community involvement. The awards and accomplishments received by the high school are tremendous reflections of the dedication and commitment of the entire Highlands High School community.

INTRODUCTION OF AMERICAN BRAILLE FLAG MEMORIAL BILL

HON. TODD TIAHRT

OF KANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 13, 2007

Mr. TIAHRT. Madam Speaker, our Nation has over 1,000,000 blind and low-vision veterans, and those numbers continue to rise. The Department of Defense estimates that 16 percent of those injured in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom suffer from severe vision loss. An additional 10–12 million Americans have blind and low vision.

Prior to the creation of the Braille American flag, the American flag was not accessible to the blind. This flag, created by the Kansas Braille Transcription Institute in Wichita, Kansas, has been specially designed in a way that informs the blind of the full color of the American flag, 13 stripes, and 50 stars on the blue field. Additionally, this tactile flag bears the Pledge of Allegiance in both raised print and grade one braille.

Today, I am introducing legislation that calls for the Army to place a Braille American flag at Arlington National Cemetery. Arlington National Cemetery is a national place of remembrance and honor for our Nation's veterans and is visited by an estimated 4 million people annually. Placing the Braille American flag there would bring honor to our Nation's blind community and allow our blind veterans to "see" the American flag again.

Madam Speaker, I am honored this legislation has been endorsed by the Blind Veterans of America, and I look forward to quick action by the Congress on the bill. We owe a huge debt of gratitude towards those who have served, and this simple action will mean much to our patriotic blind veterans. I encourage my colleagues to join me in supporting this effort in placing the Braille American flag at Arlington National Cemetery.

FREEDOM FOR DR. JOSE LUIS GARCÍA PANEQUE

HON. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 13, 2007

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART. Madam Speaker, I rise today to remind my colleagues about Dr. Jose Luis García Paneque, a political prisoner in totalitarian Cuba.

Dr. García Paneque is a surgeon by training, an independent journalist and a member of the Cuban Independent Medical Association. As a director of the independent news agency Libertad, and administrator of the Carlos J. Finlay independent library in Las Tunas, Cuba, Dr. García Paneque has devoted his life efforts to exposing the truth about the horrors inflicted upon the Cuban people by the dictatorship in Havana.

Dr. García Paneque was arrested on March 18, 2003 as part of the tyrant's island wide crackdown on peaceful pro-democracy activists. On April 4, 2003, in a sham trial, Dr. García Paneque was sentenced to 24 years in totalitarian squalor for no reason other than that he is a supporter of freedom and democ-

racy who has worked to expose the depraved horror that is the Cuban tyranny.

Since his initial incarceration in the sub-human conditions of the tyranny's totalitarian dungeons, Dr. García Paneque's weight has dropped from a healthy 190 pounds to an emaciated 110 pounds. Dr. García Paneque has been thrown in the hellish dungeons to languish in conditions so abhorrent that he has had to be hospitalized multiple times while incarcerated. Currently, he suffers from chronic diarrhea, severe abdominal pain, and poor intestinal absorption, resulting from what can only be described as a chronic malnutrition.

While imprisoned in the totalitarian dungeon, Dr. García Paneque has endured constant physical and psychological torture at the hands of regime thugs. Although he has not committed a crime, he is forced to live with common prisoners who have gone as far as to have made threats against his life, threats that the regime's thugs refuse to acknowledge as part of their constant effort to avoid having to take action to ensure his safety. After months of writhing in pain it was discovered that Dr. García Paneque had developed a 36 to 38-mm cyst on one of his kidneys. The prison doctors, who had previously ignored his cries for medical attention, claimed that surgery to remove the cyst would be required. Although his condition is perilous and there exists a serious risk that Dr. García Paneque may not survive the abdominal surgery, regime authorities refuse to grant him a consultation with doctors not affiliated with the prison, and he has yet to receive proper medical treatment for his condition.

Members of Dr. García Paneque's family, including his four children, have been repeatedly harassed. In August 2006, a regime mob of more than 50 people armed with sticks and stones surrounded the family's home, chanting insults and threatening to burn it down. In March of 2007, fearing for the life of her children who had already endured innumerable acts of psychological torture, Dr. García Paneque's wife, Yamilé Llanes Labrada, an active member of the Ladies in White, was forced to flee Cuba with her children. This is another tragic example of life under the totalitarian regime in Cuba.

On October 24, 2007, Dr. García Paneque's wife, and his daughter Shirlen, were received and honored by President George W. Bush at the White House, where the President publicly called upon the regime to release Dr. García Paneque forthwith. The President informed me personally after his meeting with Dr. García Paneque's family that he was deeply impressed and moved by their heroic examples of courage and patriotism.

Despite the gangster tactics and heinous threats against him, Dr. García Paneque continues to demand human rights and dignity for the people of Cuba. He is languishing in the squalor of the infernal gulag, at the whim of a merciless tyrant, simply because he believes in freedom, truth, democracy, and human rights for the people of Cuba.

Madam Speaker, it is unconscionable that journalists and physicians like Dr. García Paneque are locked in dungeons for writing the truth. My colleagues, we must demand the immediate and unconditional release of Jose Luis García Paneque and every political prisoner in totalitarian Cuba.